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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIRUT 003874

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NSC FOR ABRAMS/DORAN/MARCHESE/HARDING

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [LE](#)

SUBJECT: LEBANON: HARIRI TALKS ABOUT WAYS TO ENGAGE SYRIA

Classified By: Charge Christopher W. Murray. Reason: Sections 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) Sa'ad Hariri, without his usual call for a Syrian regime change, indicated that he believes the real goal of Syria and Iran is to thwart UNSCR 1701. He believes that Syria should have been engaged after its pullout from Lebanon, but through one voice, probably that of the UN. Like many other Lebanese, he thinks that the Turks are the only force that can control Syria. End summary.

SYRIAN ENGAGEMENT MIGHT
HAVE BEEN VALUABLE EARLIER

¶2. (C) Meeting with Codel Bill Nelson and the Ambassador on December 14, a somewhat subdued MP Sa'ad Hariri offered his view of the current difficult situation. Although he regularly calls for a Syrian regime change, this time he voiced the disappointment felt through the Arab world when Bashar al-Assad did not live up to the hopes raised when he, a Western-educated member of the younger generation, succeeded his father as ruler of Syria. Nevertheless Hariri suggested that it might have been better if at the time of the Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon the rest of the world had engaged Syria, at a time when the Syrians already perceived themselves to be a target. A policy of engagement, through one channel, possibly that of the United Nations, would have been best. In his opinion, the current visits to Syria by U.S. and EU officials, despite the strong messages they have delivered, are seen in Syria as a sign of weakness. The Syrians are not logical thinkers.

¶3. (C) Hariri suggested that one possible policy would be for the U.S. to coordinate its strategy with its allies and talk to Asad with one voice now, pushing Syria now that there is a chance to re-engage. He fears that the envoys are becoming hostages to Syria, and wondered what would member countries do if UNIFIL troops were harmed. A coordinated approach to let Syria know what would happen if it supports attacks against the UNIFIL troops would be helpful. Enforcement of UNSCR 1701 will bring stability for the future.

WHAT DO IRAN AND SYRIA
REALLY WANT?

¶4. (C) Hariri says that he believes the real objective of Iran, Syria, and by inference Hizballah, is the failure of

UNSCR 1701, rather than the failure of the international tribunal. Characterizing Hizballah as a one-time infant who is now an adult, he said that 1701 "handcuffed" Hizballah. Today the goal of Syria and Iran is to cripple the Siniora government and to stop the implementation of 1701. In addition, the Iranians want to make Jerusalem and the Palestinians their cause, not because they care about Israel, but in order to oppose the Saudis.

WHAT DO THEY REALLY NEED?

¶ 5. (C) The Syrians only respond to a show of force, in Hariri's opinion, and he related two anecdotes, one involving the French and the other the Turks, where Syria reacted very quickly to halt bombings in Paris and responded promptly upon the Turks' massing of troops along the Turkish-Syrian border.

The Turks might be able to control the Syrians now. While offering no comment directly on Nelson's remarks, which were a repetition of what he had publicly said earlier, that he had exchanged "sharp words" with Asad, Hariri did not condemn U.S. moves towards engagement with Syria. Hariri believes that no one in Lebanon wants the Syrians to return. But right now neither the Syrians nor the Iranians are worried, because they don't face any real challenges.

HELP THE ARMY

¶ 6. (C) If Syria is Hariri's number two concern, the first consideration would go toward strengthening the army, which Hariri characterizes as well-trained but ill-equipped. He has always asked the USG for help, so that the army can "show teeth." Meanwhile Syria and Iran represent "money, weapons, intelligence, and fighters" coming into both the north and

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south of Lebanon, as well as into Iraq and to Hamas.

¶ 7. (SBU) This cable has been cleared by Codel Nelson.

MURRAY